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Welcome to St. Paul, convention media!

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National political conventions aren't the horse races they used to be. The winner is at the finish line before the crowd even shows up, and all that's left is to proclaim the victory and watch him or her take a victory lap.

But that hasn't kept the worldwide media from showing up, as they did on Monday for a logistical "walk-through" for the Republican National Convention, which is to be held Sept. 1-4 at the Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul. More than 500 media representatives were here to make coverage arrangements for next year's event.

This may be because our two big-party conventions, minus the drama of who will be on the ticket, still set the course for the coming drama of the campaign. The conventions set a tone for each party and give them an opportunity to make their case to the American people.

So it is in the parties' interest to make sure the television anchors, newspaper scribblers, camera operators, still photographers, bloggers and talk-show hosts and Blackberry-punchers have the space and equipment they need to get the word out.

The convention, Republican Party officials noted on Monday, is 273 days away. The "X" was draped with markers showing where radio reporters and

television cameras will be placed. Everything from Wi-Fi access to the costs of renting booth space to catering choices was discussed. Praise of the arena, which wrested the convention away from the halls of Minneapolis, was lavish.

We welcome all the media, large and small, to St. Paul, to the Twin Cities and to Minnesota. This is, after all, a good state for a political convention. Our voter turnout is usually among the highest in the nation. The legacy of Hubert Humphrey and Walter Mondale left Minnesota with a liberal Democratic tradition, but neither party has a lock on the electorate today.

The governor is Republican and the Legislature is Democratic. The congressional delegation consists of six Democrats and four Republicans. Minnesota has not voted for a Republican presidential candidate since it backed Richard Nixon in 1972. But we have not had a Democratic governor since 1991. And there is a streak of independence: In 1998, voters elected third-party candidate Jesse Ventura governor.

Gov. Tim Pawlenty told the media representatives Minnesota is "nice," and he guaranteed that it will be warmer next September than it is this week. We agree with his meteorology but we'll let the good folks who come to visit be the judge of the niceness factor. We do believe Minnesota is a state that yearns for common-sense solutions to national problems. Once those reporters find their seats and plug in their technological gadgets, we'll be all eyes and ears.

To our media friends, we hometown partisans offer a friendly reminder.

We recently read a national magazine piece describing the upcoming convention and putting the event in the city of Minneapolis. It is true that

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both cities are hosting the event, and that there will be a lot going on in the hotels and auditoriums of Minneapolis. But not the convention itself.

When the candidate accepts the nomination, the balloon-drop is cued and the nominee smiles and waves and hugs his wife and/or running mate, he will be standing on a podium at the Xcel Energy Center in the city of St. Paul. Have a great convention.

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